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# Message Text

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PAGE 01 LONDON 00206 071728Z

43
ACTION EUR-12

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R 071718Z JAN 75
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7039
INFO AMCONSUL BELFAST
AMCONSUL EDINBURGH
AMCONSUL LIVERPOOL

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, UK
SUBJECT: BENN ELECTED TO LABOR PARTY POST

1. MEDIA HAVE DEVOTED CONSIDERABLE ATTENTION TO JANUARY 6 ELECTION OF INDUSTRY SECRETARY ANTHONY BENN TO CHAIRMANSHIP OF LABOR PARTY NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE'S (NEC) STANDING COMMITTEE ON HOME POLICY. ACCORDING TO PRESS, BENN WAS ONLY NOMINEE AND WAS ELECTED BY 3 TO 2 VOTE (HOME POLICY COMMITTEE HAS 16 MEMBERS) AFTER IGNORING SUGGESTION BY CHANCELLOR DENIS HEALEY, ALSO A MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE, THAT OCCUPATION OF CHAIR BY CABINET MINISTER COULD CREATE CONFLICT OF INTEREST. BENN REPLACES MODERATE TRADE UNIONIST BILL SIMPSON WHO SERVED AS CHAIRMAN DURING 1973/74 PERIOD.

2. PRESS UNANIMOUSLY STRESSED .'KEY" IMPORTANCE OF HOME POLICY COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN. THE GUARDIAN HEADLINED STORY: .'BENN CAPTURES KEY LABOR POWER POINT," AND TIMES ASSERTED THAT BENN ELECTION PLACES HIM IN POSITION WHERE HE WILL BE ABLE TO MAINTAIN STATE OF TENSION BETWEEN NEC AND GOVERNMENT AND INFLUENCE NEC'S ATTITUDE TOWARD
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PAGE 02 LONDON 00206 071728Z

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3. COMMENT: WE BELIEVE THAT MEDIA HAVE EXAGGERATED IMPORTANCE OF THIS DEVELOPMENT AND ITS POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS FOR NEC/GOVERNMENT RELATIONS. THE LABOR PARTY'S LEFT-WING ALREADY ENJOYS EFFECTIVE MAJORITY ON NEC AND RECOMMENDATIONS OR RESOLUTIONS OF THE NEC AS A WHOLE HAVE FAR MORE IMPACT THAN ACTIONS OF ITS STANDING COMMITTEES. THIS SAME BALANCE IS REFLECTED ON HOME POLICY COMMITTEE WHERE AT LEAST 9 OF 16 MEMBERS ARE LEFT-WINGERS, SO THAT THE QUESTION OF WHO OCCUPIES THE CHAIR IS ONE OF PERSONALITY RATHER THAN SUBSTANCE. THE POWER OF AN NEC STANDING COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN TO MAKE MISCHIEF, MOREOVER, APPEARS TO BE SUBSTANTIALLY LESS THAN WOULD BE INFERRED FROM THE MEDIA. TRIBUNITE IAN MIKARDO,FOR EXAMPLE, CHAIRED THE NEC'S INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE LAST YEAR AND WILL PROBABLY BE REELECTED, YET HE HAS NOT USED THIS POSITION TO ATTACK OR UNDERMINE THE LABOR GOVERNMENT'S FOREIGN POLICY, ALTHOUGH HE IS A FREQUENT BACK-BENCH CRITIC. COMMITTEE INTEREST IN THE ELECTION OF A NEW CHAIRMAN, AS INDICATED BY ATTENDANCE, WAS MINIMAL, SEEMINGLY REINFORCING THE VIEW THAT THE CHAIRMANSHIP ITSELF IS NOT OF GREAT IMPORT. FINALLY, THE LABOR PARTY RESEARCH OFFICE ADVISES THAT CABINET MEMBERS HAVE CHAIRED NEC STANDING COMMITTEES ON AT LEAST THREE PREVIOUS OCCASIONS, THE LAST BEING GEORGE BROWN WHO HEADED THE HOME POLICY COMMITTEE IN 1964.

4. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BENN'S ELECTION, ACCORDINGLY, APPEARS TO BE PERSONAL RATHER THAN IDEOLOGICAL OR INSTITUTIONAL. IF, AS MANY SPECULATE, HE IS PREPARING TO RESIGN FROM THE GOVERNMENT, PERHAPS OVER THE EC ISSUE, IN ORDER TO LEAD A LEFT-WING CHALLENGE TO WILSON'S LEADERSHIP, HE WILL BE GRATEFUL FOR A POWER BASE, HOWEVER CIRCUMSCRIBED, WITHIN THE PARTY. AS A STANDING COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN HE WOULD BE ABLE TO SPEAK WITH QREATER AUTHORITY THAN WOULD AN ORDINARY MEMBER OF THE NEC OR, FOR THAT MATTER, A BACKBENCH MP, AND WOULD ALSO ENJOY GREATER ACCESS TO THE MEDIA.

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**TAGS:** PINT, PGOV, PARLIAMENTARY LABOR PARTY, GUARDIAN, (BENN, ANTHONY)
**To:** STATE
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